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FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
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INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
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E.O. 12598: N/A

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SUBJECT: GUINEA: SEVERAL PEACEFUL PROTESTS UP COUNTRY

REFS: (A) Conakry 1616, (B) Conakry 1622

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Between October 26 and October 30, Guinea experienced several peaceful demonstrations up country. N'Zerekore remains calm in the wake of an October 26 march by over 5000 citizens in the city (ref A). Two demonstrations in the port city of Kamsar were led by women protesting reductions in the health and family benefits offered to employees of the Bauxite Company of Guinea (CBG). On October 30, youth blocked traffic in protest of road conditions and lack of electricity and water in the mining town of Fria. The protests do not appear to be linked in any coordinated fashion and have arisen spontaneously in response to local issues. All of the cities remain peaceful. End Summary.

Calm in N'Zerekore as Citizens Await Government Assistance

¶2. (SBU) On October 26, N'Zerekore was shut down with a peaceful protest by over 5000 citizens who marched through the streets of the regional capital (reftel). In the wake of the protest, the government responded with a promise to mobilize immediate resources for road repair. On October 28, Moussa Solano, Minister of State for Internal Affairs and Government Spokesperson, and Bana Sidibe, Minister of State for Equipment, Territorial Development and Environment, met with industrial, commercial, transportation, and agro-forestry companies to ask for assistance and support for urgent public works projects for N'Zerekore.

¶3. (SBU) Although the citizens called for the removal of N'Zerekore's governor, Colonel Lamine Bangoura, and the prefet, Commander Algassimou Barry, they remain in office. A presidential decree would be necessary to remove them. Barry has been called to Conakry for urgent business, and although Bangoura left N'Zerekore at the height of the protest, he has since returned. Our contacts told us that Solano and Sidibe, along with Madikaba Camara, Minister of State for Economic Development, and representatives from UNDP are planning to go to N'Zerekore on November 8 to address the population directly. Since the protest, no senior government official has visited the region in person although they have all made public comments on government development efforts in the region.

Women Take Lead in Kamsar Demonstrations

¶4. (SBU) On October 25, women blocked road traffic in the mining and port town of Kamsar. They were demonstrating the October 24 notice from CBG cutting company benefits to workers' families. Last month, the company management decided to limit the number of covered dependent children to ten and the number of covered dependent wives to two. Minister of State Solano took the presidential helicopter

to Kamsar to mediate the crisis. After his intervention, CGB agreed to rescind its decision. However, on October 30, the women once again blocked the streets to demand the removal of several CBG employees they claimed were hostile to the cultural and familial norms of the community. Although press reports indicate that the women also blocked railway lines, our contacts at CBG said its operations were not effected. The protest remained peaceful, and no arrests were reported. Kamsar is a major location for the operations of CBG, Alcoa, and Global Alumina (ref B).

Fria Protests Government Failure to Provide Services

15. (SBU) On October 30, citizens in the bauxite mining town of Fria blocked the roads to demonstrate the government failure to mobile resources for road repairs. During that day, all shops and offices remained closed. On July 25, the Russian aluminum company RUSAL signed an agreement with the government to provide USD 5 million for road repairs in the city, where it operates bauxite mines and an alumina refinery. The local population claims that, in the interim, there has been no movement by the Ministry of Public Works and accused the government of re-directing funds intended for the community. During the protest, citizens called for immediate action to provide better roads, electricity, and water. By October 31, all the barricades were removed and normal activities resumed. There were no reports of arrests.

Comment

16. (SBU) We received reports of protest in the city of Boke, but our contacts on the ground stated that nothing out of the ordinary

CONAKRY 00001647 002 OF 002

occurred. While the demonstrations in N'Zerekore, Kamsar, and Fria took place over the same general period of time, they were coordinated. In each case, the community was responding to local issues. This spate of protests reflects a general sense of discontent on the part of a population grappling with a dire economic situation and no basic services. The government is responding with reactive measures when the demonstrations occur rather than proactively tackling the root problems. To its credit, the government has not responded to any of the civil movements with force. All of the protests have remained peaceful. We continue to closely monitor the situation in these locations.

MCDONALD